

Promising Practice: Career Coordinators in Rural Communities

Central Susquehanna Intermediate Unit

The Work Attributes Toward Careers in Healthcare (WATCH) program serves HPOG participants in a rural, ten-county region. A key to the program's success is how its network of strategically-placed WATCH Career Coordinators (Coordinators) serves participants in the region's communities.

Cross-trained for multiple roles, Coordinators serve as case managers, job developers, mentors, and all-purpose participant advocates. To effectively cover all communities in this geographically large area, Coordinators are located at different types of organizations, including post-secondary institutions, Department of Public Welfare offices, libraries, and adult basic education providers, depending on what is the most accessible and practical location in a particular county. By focusing on a specific community, Coordinators are able to develop close working relationships with the key partners in the area, such as college staff and the human resources staff of local employers, and leverage these relationships in the service of participants. Once a week, all Coordinators meet at the WATCH main office to share their challenges, get advice from each other, and leverage the knowledge of the team.

In their case management role, Coordinators verify eligibility and assist participants in the intake process, refer participants to support services as needed, and coordinate enrollment processes. Working together, the participant and Coordinator create an Individual Service Plan for every six months they are enrolled in the program, outlining long- and short-term academic, career, and personal goals. Participants identify potential barriers to meeting their goals and discuss strategies to address these barriers. If the WATCH participant has children, the Coordinator works with the participant to create a childcare plan. Once enrolled in the WATCH program, participants meet with their Coordinators face-to-face at least once a month and communicate by phone, email, or text messaging on a weekly basis.

Coordinators monitor participants' progress in educational programs and assist them when they need additional tutoring and other support services. The unique relationship Coordinators build with their participants supports school persistence and completion. Participants know they can approach their Coordinator about academic problems early in the semester or program so that tutoring or additional support services can be provided in time to ensure success. Education providers appreciate how the WATCH Career Coordinators support the academic success of their students. These partners can contact Coordinators when students demonstrate signs of trouble such as absences, tardiness, rule infractions, poor performance, as well as personal issues that may affect academic success.

In their job developer role, Coordinators contact area employers to explain the WATCH program, its procedures, and how its support services help participants succeed. Coordinators arrange meetings with employer representatives to discuss their specific employment needs. Through these interactions, WATCH staff and participants have learned what employers are

looking for in a potential employee and regional employers have learned the value of the screening, case management, and support services WATCH provides.

Once placed in jobs, WATCH participants receive three to six months of employment transition support depending on their occupational track. During this period, participants continue to meet regularly with their Coordinators and participate in a minimum of quarterly cohort meetings. Through these frequent contacts, WATCH participants are mentored and supported by their Coordinators, as well as their peers, as they begin their new careers. Coordinators keep in close communication with human resource personnel and direct supervisors to monitor a participant's job performance. By working with participants from recruitment to post-placement, and developing and leveraging relationships in the community, WATCH Career Coordinators provide the mentoring and support that helps HPOG participants succeed.